

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor suspends Washington County Tax Collector; Attorney General investigates criminal charges

Mickey Fratesi named to temporarily replace indicted official

(JACKSON, Mississippi) – Acting on an official request from the Washington County Board of Supervisors, Governor Haley Barbour has suspended Washington County Tax Collector Patricia Lee as a criminal investigation continues against her.

Governor Barbour's executive order removing Lee from office was executed earlier today by representatives of Mississippi Attorney General Jim Hood. Lee was indicted by a Washington County grand jury on December 15, 2007, on two counts of knowingly and willfully making fraudulent statements and representations with the intent to defraud the state, county, municipality or other subdivision of the state or local government, in violation of Miss. Code Ann. § 97-7-10.

Meanwhile, auditors and investigators from State Auditor Phil Bryant's office were conducting a cash count today at the tax collector's office in the Washington County Courthouse at Greenville.

"This action is in the public's interest as serious criminal charges involving activities of the Washington County Tax Collector are investigated," Governor Barbour said. "I know the Attorney General and Auditor are working aggressively with local officials to bring this matter to a conclusion as quickly as possible while protecting the taxpayers' interests."

Governor Barbour also announced he has accepted Washington County supervisors' recommendation that Mickey Fratesi be appointed to temporarily fill the tax collector's position while the criminal case against Lee proceeds.

Executive Order No. 995, signed by Governor Barbour, found that Lee has defaulted on her lawful responsibilities as tax collector of Washington County and should be removed from office until criminal charges against her are resolved. Under the Mississippi Constitution and state statutes, Governors have authority to suspend alleged defaulting tax collectors and appoint temporary replacements.

A December 19, 2007, letter from the Washington County Board of Supervisors requested Lee's suspension and appointment of an interim tax collector. She had been

reelected in the 2007 general election and was to be sworn in to another term of office soon.

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